

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 260356Z DEC 75
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6057

S E C R E T BANGKOK 26807

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP, TH
SUBJECT: TRAVEL OF THE PRIME MINISTER

REF: STATE 296462

SUMMARY. THAI FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI TOLD AMBASSADOR DECEMBER 18 THAT PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT MIGHT GO TO EUROPE IN SPRING OF 1976. FOR NUMBER OF REASONS WE BELIEVE HE WOULD WISH TO COMBINE VISIT TO U.S. WITH TRIP TO EUROPE, THOUGH THAI PLANNING IS CLEARLY IN EARLY STAGE. WE SEE ADVANTAGES AND FEW DRAWBACKS IN KHUKRIT VISIT TO U.S. VISIT WOULD CROWN ONGOING, EXTENSIVE REMODELLING OF U.S./THAI BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP AND WOULD GENERATE FAVORABLE PUBLICITY FROM BOTH THAI AND U.S. VIEWPOINT. KHUKRIT VISIT WOULD HAVE TO BE FULL-BORE OFFICIAL VISIT, AS THIS IS WHAT KHUKRIT HAS RECEIVED FROM ALL FOREIGN COUNTRIES HE HAS VISITED SO FAR. END SUMMARY.

1. IN RESPONSE TO THE INSTRUCTIONS IN THE REFTTEL, THE AMBASSADOR QUERIED FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI INFORMALLY ON

DECEMBER 18 REGARDING PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT'S TRAVEL PLANS. CHATCHAI RESPONDED THAT NOTHING WAS DEFINITE, BUT KHUKRIT MIGHT GO TO EUROPE IN THE SPRING. HE WENT ON TO THEORIZE THAT THAT MIGHT NOT BE SUCH A CONVENIENT TIME FOR WASHINGTON BECAUSE OF THE GATHERING MOMENTUM OF THE U.S. ELECTIONS.

2. WE INFER FROM CHATCHAI'S HANDLING OF THE SUBJECT THAT
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THAI CONSIDERATION OF A TRIP TO THE U.S. IS AT A VERY EARLY

STAGE. WE BELIEVE THAT IF KHUKRIT DOES GO TO EUROPE THIS SPRING, HE WOULD PROBABLY WANT TO GO ON TO THE U.S. NOT TO DO SO WOULD INVITE PUBLIC SPECULATION THAT BANGKOK-WASHINGTON RELATIONS WERE COOL. CONVERSELY, WE BELIEVE THAT KHUKRIT WOULD NOT WANT TO GO TO THE U.S. WITHOUT COMBINING IT WITH HIS LONG ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO GO TO EUROPE.

3. ON BALANCE, WE SEE CONSIDERABLE ADVANTAGES AND FEW DRAWBACKS TO THE U.S. INVITING PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT TO VISIT WASHINGTON NEXT APRIL. IT WOULD BE A SUITABLE OCCASION TO CAP THE CURRENT, EXTENSIVE REMODELING OF THE U.S./THAI BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP; IT WOULD ENGENDER CONSIDERABLE FAVORABLE PUBLICITY FOR THE U.S. IN THAILAND; AND IT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY GENERATE CONSIDERABLE FAVORABLE PUBLICITY FOR THAILAND IN THE U.S. THIS LAST POINT MIGHT MITIGATE SOME OF THAILAND'S TRADITIONALLY BAD IMAGE IN THE U.S. MEDIA, AND SOFTEN SOME OF THE CONGRESSIONAL RESISTANCE TO SUPPORTING OUR PROGRAMS AND INTERESTS HERE. IN THIS CONNECTION, KHUKRIT IS PROBABLY THE MOST ARTICULATE, SKILLED AND POLISHED PRIME MINISTER THAILAND IS LIKELY TO HAVE FOR YEARS TO COME, AND IT MAKES GOOD SENSE FROM BOTH STANDPOINTS TO MAXIMIZE HIS POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRENGTHENING OF U.S./THAI BILATERAL RELATIONS.

4. THE POSSIBILITY OF A HIGH LEVEL U.S. OFFICIAL VISIT TO THAILAND IN THE SPRING OF 1976 WOULD NOT CONFLICT WITH A KHUKRIT VISIT. ON THE CONTRARY, KHUKRIT'S TRIP WOULD BE OUR CHANCE TO REPAY THAI HOSPITALITY.

5. AS FOR THE TYPE OF U.S. VISIT THAT WOULD BE MOST APPROPRIATE, THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT IT MUST BE A FULL-BORE OFFICIAL VISIT. IT SHOULD INCLUDE KHUKRIT'S STAYING AT BLAIR HOUSE, MEANINGFUL DISCUSSIONS WITH PRESIDENT FORD, AND HOPEFULLY A WHITE HOUSE DINNER IN KHUKRIT'S HONOR. THIS IS THE FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENT OF WHAT KHUKRIT HAS RECEIVED FROM EVERY FOREIGN COUNTRY HE HAS VISITED SINCE TAKING OFFICE. IT WOULD CREATE REAL PROBLEMS IF THAILAND'S CLOSEST ALLY OFFERED ANY LESS. MOREOVER, KHUKRIT IS EXTREMELY SENSITIVE ABOUT THESE KINDS OF NUANCES. FLATTERING KHUKRIT BY DOING THE VISIT UP RIGHT WOULD REDOUND EVERY BIT AS MUCH TO OUR ADVANTAGE AS ANYTHING WHICH IN THAI EYES MIGHT BE A SLIGHT WOULD COMPLICATE OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS FOR THE REST

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OF HIS TIME IN OFFICE.
WHITEHOUSE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HEAD OF GOVERNMENT VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 26 DEC 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: izenbei0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BANGKO26807
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750448-0157
From: BANGKOK
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751211/aaaaaiye.tel
Line Count: 109
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 76 STATE 296462
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: izenbei0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 JUL 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 JUL 2003 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <20 NOV 2003 by izenbei0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TRAVEL OF THE PRIME MINISTER
TAGS: OVIP, PFOR, TH, US, XG, (KHUKRIT PRAMOT)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006